



A Union of Professionals

Joining Voices

Inclusive Strategies for Labor's Renewal

Despite unprecedented efforts in organizing, political mobilization and community outreach, organized labor today commands less power to save and secure good-paying jobs, expand collective bargaining rights throughout the economy, enact family-friendly national legislation and assure decent education, housing, healthcare and dignified retirement for American workers than at any time in more than half a century.

Over the past decade, often with the assistance and encouragement of the AFL-CIO, many individual unions have devoted increasingly more attention, energy and resources to organizing new members. The Organizing Institute has trained thousands of smart, tough new organizers who are putting their skills to use helping workers establish unions. Over the past 10, years, the AFL-CIO has inaugurated a series of successive high-profile campaigns and mobilizations including Union Cities, the Strawberry Workers Campaign, Voice@Work, Change to Organize, Union Summer, Senior Summer, Street Heat, and the Immigration Freedom Rides. AFL-CIO procedures have changed with the aim of eliminating interunion competition by establishing rules and guidelines for reserving specific targeted units for specific qualifying unions. Unions have entered into strategic joint organizing campaigns. A number of individual unions have experimented with enlisting "nontraditional" workers via nontraditional means—from information technology "independent contractors," to nonmajority industrial workers, to associations of private practice psychologists and dental hygienists, to teachers and public employees not covered by collective bargaining laws. The AFL-CIO's Working America program signed up nearly 1 million unaffiliated workers during the 2004 elections.

Still, the labor movement as a whole has been unable to reverse the slide of union membership and representation. Sixty years ago, union membership stood at over 35 percent of the workforce. Thirty years ago, it was 26 percent. Today, 12 percent of all workers (8 percent in private sector employment) belong to unions.

It's fair to ask why, and what—if anything—organized labor can and should do now to reverse this trend.

On the political front, the American labor movement put more volunteers, staff, treasure and effort into the 2004 presidential elections than ever before—a ground effort that far surpassed in coordination, depth, breadth, reach and heart the work of any other sector among our allies. Through sophisticated technology, targeting, direct mail, phone banks, literature distribution and unprecedented one-on-one communications, America's unions effectively reached millions of workers and their families to turn out the vote for labor's candidates.

Still, we lost.

With regard to legislation and public policy, the AFL-CIO mobilized demonstrations, telephone calls, e-mails and post-card campaigns in support of the Employee Free Choice Act, with the result that 244 members of Congress are on record as co-sponsors.

Still, we are a long way from enacting legislation that will give meaningful organizing and collective bargaining rights to all workers, strengthen worker protections, straighten out an unfair taxation system or block the flight offshore of good-paying union jobs. Most of our legislative successes have been defensive, but in struggles to move a positive agenda forward, organized labor all too often is seen by politicians, the public, and even unorganized workers, as just another interest group feathering an institutional nest or defending for our members rights and privileges denied most other Americans.

External events certainly shape much of the environment that confronts us. Advances in technology, the globalization of services and production, geopolitical upheavals, war and global terror, international energy politics and trade, and the changing nature of work and production involve many significant international, governmental, quasi-governmental, diplomatic, military, financial, scientific, entrepreneurial and manufacturing players. To the extent that organized labor can influence these sectors on matters of concern, we should.

But our first step in renewing organized labor's influence and strength is to examine the institutions and operations over which we have the most direct power and control. That means looking closely not only at our own individual unions—which the AFT and many affiliates already have undertaken—but also at the principles, mission, message, strategies, structure and operations of the federation to which we all belong.

We believe that a strong, effective American labor movement is vital to realizing the goals and dreams of working families throughout our country and to achieving security, democracy, and peace throughout the world. We believe that by reasserting our role as the leading voice for the needs and aspirations of working families, the AFL-CIO will strengthen its power to advocate for the workplace needs of all our current, and future, members.

The analysis and recommendations that follow are intended to contribute to an introspective, constructive and practical conversation among constituent unions and the leadership of the AFL-CIO aimed at improving the effectiveness of our movement. These comments are offered with humility, good faith, the spirit of solidarity, and in the conviction that we have it in our collective power to fix what's wrong with our movement, strengthen what's right and achieve the universal benefits of freedom, security, democracy, and social and economic justice to which all human beings are entitled as a matter of fairness and right.

Lead With Our Values—*A People's Agenda*

Organized labor was founded to advance a people's agenda, but increasingly we've come to be viewed as another special interest. As private sector union membership declines with the international outsourcing of production; the emergence of vehemently anti-union retail chains and manufacturing transplants; and the ascendancy of virtual employers and contingent employment in high tech, information and service sectors, union-represented shops are viewed increasingly as islands of privilege as compared to the situations in which most workers find themselves. Struggles to win or hold onto paid health insurance and pensions, workplace rules and job security barely command sympathy or support from the overwhelming majority of workers and their families who are not covered by union contracts and who may not even be considered "employees" in the traditional sense. As the labor movement loses membership and the proportion of workers belonging to unions continues to shrink, we run the risk of further isolating ourselves from the public at large when our focus narrows to the needs of unions rather than the needs of workers and their families.

Over the past quarter century, working people in the United States have suffered an accelerated erosion of the basic human right to freely choose and join unions. Workers seeking to exercise their rights of free association are

routinely isolated, subjected to threatening harangues in captive meetings, permanently replaced, and outright fired. Coercion against workers attempting to form unions has come to be the norm rather than the exception, and in more instances than not such coercive employer behavior is countenanced under the law. Employers routinely circumvent their obligations under collective bargaining by sabotaging negotiations or running to the courts to get out from under pension payments, health coverage or salaries supposedly negotiated and agreed to in good faith. Where employers purposely violate the law, penalties are either nonexistent or so meaningless that routine illegal conduct against workers is encouraged rather than deterred.

Free labor unions, free association and the unfettered right of all workers to join their voices in mutual support and self-help are hallmarks of democratic societies throughout the world. To the extent that those opposed to the expansion and effective exercise of workplace democracy succeed in portraying the labor movement as a narrow interest group gaining advantage for the few at the expense of the vast majority of nonunion workers, they are able to divide natural allies with wedge issues and thereby consolidate political and economic power against the interests of the middle class and working people everywhere.

Clearly, organized labor's situation calls for critical self-examination. But to the extent that such self-examination *narrowly* concentrates on remedying external obstacles to union organizing, internal structure, jurisdiction and density, our relevance to the lives, interests and concerns of the nonunion general public diminishes further.

The answer to the existential question "What does labor want?" is as relevant and immediate today as when Samuel Gompers replied, nearly 100 years ago:

"What does labor want?

"It wants the earth and the fullness thereof. There is nothing too precious; there is nothing too beautiful, too lofty, too ennobling, unless it is within the scope and comprehension of labor's aspirations and wants.

"We want more schoolhouses and less jails, more books and less arsenals, more learning and less vice, more constant work and less crime, more leisure and less greed, more justice and less revenge. In fact, more of the opportunities to cultivate our better natures, to make manhood more noble, womanhood more beautiful and childhood more happy and bright."

What labor stands for matters and must inform everything we set out to accomplish.

If what we stand for *first* is more powerful unions, card check and neutrality, density and market share, we're going to continue to become even more marginalized, even when we win. Labor's power, legitimacy and appeal are derived from enduring principles rather than from more-effective tactics and efficient structures.

Our agenda must include more than securing a union shop, removing obstacles to organizing and stiffer employer fines. Organized labor needs to earn our role and recognition as the people's lobby. We must speak immediately, consistently and *convincingly* to the values and interests of all working families—union members or not. These include:

- **Full employment and fair compensation.** A good job is essential to the emergence and preservation of strong families and a humane and democratic society. We believe in defending American jobs and creating new opportunities for work that will meet social and consumer needs as well as boost and sustain an increasing and secure standard of living for American working families.
- **Dignified work and dignified retirement.** Workers have the right to decent conditions of work and to be treated decently on the job. They have the right to be dealt with fairly and with respect, to seek

redress of grievances without retribution, and to be allowed to fulfill family obligations when they arise. After a lifetime's service, workers are entitled to sufficient and secure pensions, irrespective of the number, or subsequent financial status, of the enterprises that employed them.

- **Healthcare and leisure.** No individual should be denied accessible, quality healthcare because of inability to pay, nor should workers be required to labor consistently for extended hours or at several "part-time" jobs during the course of a day simply to make ends meet or to qualify for health coverage. Families are not secure unless they know for certain that their needs for a healthy life will be met, and they are not strengthened without the leisure time necessary for nurturing parental and familial bonds.
- **Quality public education and available child care for all.** A high- quality public education, from prekindergarten through college, is key to an informed citizenry, a healthy democracy, expanded opportunity, and the technological and scientific leadership necessary for ensuring a full-employment economy.
- **Civil rights and economic opportunity.** The labor movement stands for equality of all individuals before the law, and in opposition to discrimination under the law or in employment or commerce. We believe that America is the land of opportunity and that the opportunity America represents is not limited by ethnicity, race, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, physical condition or age. The labor movement is dedicated to eliminating bias and discrimination in all of their manifestations.
- **Decent housing and quality public services.** We believe that government can play a positive role in ensuring the availability of decent shelter for all citizens either through direct provision of services or through incentives, standards setting or partnership with the private sector. Moreover, the universal availability and provision of high-quality accessible public services cannot be conditioned on market forces but must be seen in terms of the mutual responsibility and benefits of citizenship. Decent housing, clean air and water, good roads and public transportation, safe food, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, family and children's services, fair administration of justice, employment training and job placement, respite care, and fire and police protection keep families secure and hold our society together.
- **Participation in the structure, processes and quality of work.** Those intimately involved in the production of goods and delivery of services are in the best position to identify ways to improve quality, efficiency and productivity. Society benefits when workers are allowed to do a good job. Workers should not be denied the opportunity to participate in quality design and improvement, nor should they and their colleagues be penalized for their success.
- **International solidarity for universal labor rights as a human right.** We stand for freedom of association and the unfettered right to collective action and self-help, both at home and abroad, in the same way we stand for freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from child labor or sexual exploitation, and freedom from persecution on the basis of language, faith, gender, ethnicity, race, caste, sexual orientation or family origin. These freedoms cannot exist where democracy does not exist. It therefore should come as no surprise that under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, the American labor movement was instrumental in defeating Nazism, fascism in Chile, apartheid in South Africa, and communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. At the same time, we have fought to safeguard domestic freedom and civil liberties. The labor movement's historic commitment to the struggle against totalitarianism, aggression and international terror is a foundation of our democracy.

These are the enduring values that define what we stand for and who we are, and we need to make certain we lead with them. Our values need to be embodied in our communications and in the efforts we undertake. They need to reflect the aspirations of working people for a safe world secure from aggression, fairness and equality of treatment and opportunity at home, a strong social safety net to support families, freedom of speech and religious

expression, universal quality education and health, civil liberties, full employment, fairness at work and dignity in old age. There should be no doubt in the minds of working people, politicians, the press and the public at large what labor stands for. We need to incorporate our values unambiguously in what we say and do and re-establish labor's role as a participant in the significant social and economic debates of our era.

Similarly, our structures, strategies, legislative policies, politics, and external and internal behavior need to reflect and advance our values. If we believe in self-determination in the society at large, our movement needs to promote democracy in crafting the means for getting there. We cannot adapt corporate culture, vocabulary and values as our own and thereby run the risk of simply redistributing power within a diminishing labor movement instead of increasing power for, and for the good of, all working people everywhere.

The Organizing Imperative

Transforming labor's vision for a peaceful, free world and a secure, just and more equal society requires transforming the way unions operate, because how we operate determines how unions are perceived.

There was a time when the labor movement's voice was sought for its moral content on issues such as child labor, universal public education, civil rights and equality for racial and ethnic minorities, religious freedom, international struggles for democracy and tolerance, military defense and trade. Today, the conversation is much narrower and shorter. Opinion makers, legislators and political leaders, academics and the press—if they look to labor at all for comment—engage with us purely in terms of what they perceive to be organized labor's self-interest: international trade agreements, the importation of foreign workers and the export of U.S. jobs, minimum wage fights, and the occasional strike or labor dispute.

There is nothing wrong with the AFL-CIO speaking aggressively to the need for labor rights and the rights of individual workers to organize and to be treated fairly on the job. That is organized labor's obligation and privilege. But our advocacy is most effective when we speak to these issues within an overarching context of labor's values. Labor's public statements, our representations before the Congress and state legislatures, our publications and periodicals need to be forthright, consistent and unmistakably clear that our positions reflect and advance a larger vision of social and economic justice on behalf of our society and all working families. Less attention to novelty and greater concentration on substance, meaning and principles will carry the movement further and deeper than we're reaching now.

The labor movement must grow at an unprecedented pace and scale for marshaling the power to realize our vision.

Compelling ideas alone won't win justice for working people. Our challenge is to mobilize workers around resonant values, assist them in organizing for self-help, and then to assist in directing the power of numbers and solidarity toward achieving workplace fairness, a decent standard of living, an enriched quality of life, security and peace. Increasing labor's numbers can translate into more say on the job, legislation for a more comprehensive and humane social safety net, fair tax and trade policies, and a political and social culture that values the concerns and needs of working families.

We must look to organize workers in traditional and nontraditional venues and occupations at the same time that we defend the jobs, rights and benefits of current union members.

We need to organize strategically, which means finding new ways for unions to cooperate rather than compete and focusing our combined energies and resources on building critical mass along occupational, industrial, geographic and corporate lines.

We need to experiment with various organizational models that speak to the needs and interests of heretofore unorganized professional and technical workers, workers who are denied collective bargaining rights under current law, part-time and contingent employees, independent contractors, and associations of solo and small group practitioners.

We need to look to the structures and institutions that currently represent workers, determine what changes need to be made, then summon the will to make them.

We need to commit the resources necessary for realizing our vision.

The Changes We Seek Must Reflect and Advance Our Values

Labor's strength is in our values and in the activism and involvement of workers—through workplace organization, collective bargaining, electoral politics and legislative advocacy, participation in advancing work quality and standards, international solidarity or concerted militant action.

Organized labor is, and must act as, the people's lobby. Our concerns and activism extend beyond our institutions and members to the unorganized workplace, all working families, the community, the nation and the world.

The rights of all workers to freely associate for self-help, mutual support and concerted activity is a human right to which all workers irrespective of status or occupation are entitled. Unions are the vehicle for workers to express and realize their vision of social justice and workplace democracy.

Workplace democracy counts: Workers aren't commodities or inert molecules to be traded, rearranged or reassembled into organizational units of larger but ultimately hollow critical mass. Unions represent the collective views of the workers. Unions aren't corporations and shouldn't adopt their vocabulary, self-aggrandizing strategies or zero-sum values.

The strong are obligated to help the weak; the organized are obligated to reach out to the unorganized without the expectation of narrow institutional gain. Growing a single union at the expense of many doesn't necessarily increase labor's power.

Cooperation needs to be increased, competition reduced.

Not every structural or operational model works for every group of workers all the time or in the same way. Labor's future depends on reaching out meaningfully to unorganized professional and technical personnel as well as to immigrant and low-wage workers. Current legal frameworks for organizing do not work, so we must find ways to change or work around them.

Bricks and mortar, while needing to be protected and conserved, are the least of a union's treasure. Organizing begins on the ground. Grass-roots activism, in its full variety of forms, is what this labor movement is about.

Recommendations for Change

1. Restructure the AFL-CIO

- Streamline governance and administration

The number of members on the executive council should be reduced substantially. Opportunities for leadership participation would be expanded by and through involvement in Industry/Occupation Labor Centers.

Broad economic, labor and social policy issues should be dealt with by the AFL-CIO in the capacity as labor's center. The AFL-CIO's focus and functions should be limited to and concentrated in six areas:

1. Public policy and legislative advocacy
2. Political mobilization
3. International labor solidarity
4. Support for organizing
5. Jurisdictional coordination
6. Support, training and programmatic coordination for state and local bodies

- Differences should be aired and thoroughly discussed rather than papered over.

This means fewer staff presentations, scripting and outside speakers and more thorough discussion and participation by executive council or executive committee members. Officers, committee chairs and executive council members should be encouraged to circulate discussion documents in advance of meetings, and sufficient time should be allotted for full discussion of policy and programmatic issues.

2. Upgrade the Capacity of Subordinate Bodies

Labor needs dependable, effective and accountable vehicles for advancing movement-wide policies and priorities at the state and local levels. The current structure of state and central bodies each chartered by the AFL-CIO yet haphazardly financed and programmatically disconnected all too often results in a diffusion of resources, duplication of effort, or little or no effort at all. Yet, where state or local bodies enjoy solid participation and financing, good leadership and the active involvement of affiliates, they have been the key to advancing socially progressive policies and winning victories for working people and their families. The challenge is how to strengthen subordinate bodies, expand their financial capacity and affiliate involvement, and build in programmatic and performance accountability while at the same time strengthening responsiveness and local participation.

As the field arm of the national labor movement, state and central bodies need to be interconnected in terms of leadership, program and resources nationally and within each state. Now, coordination between central labor councils and their state affiliates is inconsistent and haphazard at best, which also can be said of the relationships between the national AFL-CIO and subordinate bodies. Active local central labor

councils currently are free to establish independent programmatic and resource assistance relationships with national AFL-CIO departments or staff without necessarily coordinating with their respective state bodies. Conversely, neither the national AFL-CIO nor state AFL-CIOs have the ability to shake barely active local central bodies from dormancy to activism even in the most urgent circumstances. This lack of coordination prevents labor from marshaling to the greatest extent possible the strength we already have, and it limits the strength and power we can achieve.

One way to increase the effectiveness, activism and accountability of central labor bodies is by requiring ongoing coordination between and among all levels of the federation and its subordinate bodies, and to require full membership affiliation of all international unions at every level of the federation.

The details of ensuring such coordination are open to fuller discussion, but one option might have state and central or metro labor federations funded directly by the national AFL-CIO out of international union per capita that reflect full participation and affiliation, with allocations made roughly on the basis of international union membership within each state. Alternatively, allocations to subordinate bodies could be determined in accordance with strategic plans based on local opportunities and movement-wide priorities. Coordination between state and local (or metro) bodies would be required.

In order to ensure economies of scale as well as programmatic and resource accountability, the AFL-CIO executive council would establish programmatic and resource standards with respect to subordinate bodies. Such standards might have to do with consolidation for achieving numerical and geographic critical mass, the efficient and effective deployment of resources and staff, expanding political and legislative influence and reach, and maximizing measurable and effective rank-and-file mobilization.

Toward that end, special attention would need to be devoted to making certain that local activism and involvement (especially in ex-urban and rural communities) are not sacrificed through the consolidation process and that proper venues are created for giving expression and participation to workers at the grass roots no matter where they reside.

These constructs are posed as starting points for further consideration. Admittedly, not all of the details or implications have been dealt with or anticipated here, especially with respect to striking effective balances between consolidation and grass-roots participation, allocation of resources, and the mechanisms of mutual accountability. Still, improving the capacity, coordination, strength and effectiveness of our ability to carry out a unified labor program at the state and local levels is key to any structural reform our movement undertakes.

3. Refocus the AFL-CIO's Organizing Mission: Cooperation, Not Competition

Article XXI, strategic campaign registration, and changes in Article XX have failed to promote large-scale movement-wide growth. These approaches seek to eliminate interunion competition but all too often have had exactly the opposite effect by promoting claim-staking, place-holding, and exclusionary alliances rather than strategic cooperation. The best way to prevent hot-shop "poaching" is by establishing mechanisms for unions to lay their organizing cards on the table and to join together with other interested and able unions to map out long-term strategies for inclusive large-scale targeted campaigns.

Therefore, rather than focus inordinately on rules and procedures for keeping individual unions out of organizing, the *AFL-CIO should seek to replace a culture of exclusion with one of cooperation and inclusion*, especially among those industries, employers, occupations and geographic regions characterized by low rates of union membership.

The AFL-CIO—either through the national office or through *Industry/Occupation Labor Centers* (described below)—should seek to play a central role in assembling coalitions of unions willing and able to undertake large-scale significant cooperative organizing efforts focusing on a single industry, occupation, employer or chain, geographic region, or any other configuration that makes sense. Individual unions should be free to choose which and how many of these cooperative organizing efforts to enter into, and no union should be disqualified peremptorily from participation in any cooperative effort provided it is willing and able to meet the resource commitment and performance criteria for participation established by the group.

These criteria may involve committing specific financial resources over a specified length of time; assigning a specific number of staff; participation in and acceptance of group decision-making; coordinated contract negotiations, etc. Unions that want to participate in a particular campaign but don't have the resources to do so, would be free to seek out a sponsor union or to partner with another union willing to help put up the necessary resources. With the AFL-CIO playing a more central role in bringing unions together to undertake large-scale campaigns, what unions lose through the loosening of jurisdiction or by deciding to forgo competition with other unions they stand to gain many times over as a result of new doors opened through expanded systematic opportunities for cooperative large-scale organizing and the increased clout and economies of scale that come through partnership.

4. Establish Industry/Occupation Labor Centers

For numbers to translate into real power, organizing will need to become more than chasing, or fighting over, hot shops. Strategic organizing must concentrate on building critical mass in entire regions, professions and industries as well as among national retailers, manufacturers and service chains. A critical mass of unionized workers is the key to raising and preserving employment standards, successful collective bargaining and representation, and the ability to make a difference in politics and legislation.

In a perfect world, it might be that all workers in a single profession or industry or geographic area, or in the employ of a single corporation, would belong to the same two or three unions. Some have asserted that scattering membership in the same jurisdictions among a larger number of unions impedes strategic organizing, undermines contract standards and weakens solidarity. This may be the case, but we are unaware of any reliable and valid objective data demonstrating that critical mass or density occurring within a single union as opposed to several results in better or poorer outcomes for any given segments of the workforce, especially in those jurisdictions where unions represent less than 15 percent of the total workforce.

In some sense, given circumstances in which the critical mass of unionized workers—except teachers, school support staff, and public employees—hovers in the low double digits throughout the economy, and many unions have reached beyond their original "core" jurisdictions to organize workers in distantly related occupations and industries, it is worth asking whether in the real world it is fair or prudent to ask workers to wait while competing unions challenge one another for exclusive organizing domains.

Wouldn't it be more in keeping with labor's values to find, if we can, more effective approaches and structures built on solidarity and inclusion, rather than on establishing and protecting a franchise?

One such cooperative approach might be the establishment of Industry/Occupation Labor Centers formed by voluntary association for the purpose of initiating and supporting cooperative organizing efforts; coordinating campaign research education and training; conducting related program and policy development; setting contract standards; and coordinating joint multiunion bargaining.

Building upon labor's experience in the Building Trades, the Industrial Union Department's coordinated bargaining at GE, and the Kaiser Coalition, to cite three examples, these Industry/Occupation Labor Centers would meet more frequently than the AFL-CIO executive council (at the leadership and staff levels) and would be the primary and most frequent point of interaction between individual unions and the federation.

Industry/Occupation Labor Centers would be the venue for assembling organizing coalitions and coordinating multiunion representation efforts. Membership would be voluntary, with no restriction on the number of labor centers to which any one union could belong so long as it met established standards of participation. Such centers would be expected to establish rigorous standards for participation binding on individual unions, including specific financial and staff commitments to organizing over a long period of time; participation in planning and adherence to group decisions regarding strategy, target selection, jurisdiction and coordinated collective bargaining.

Industry/Occupation Labor Centers would be formed as voluntary, permanent self-governing and self-sustaining bodies under the AFL-CIO umbrella, but with their own staffs, sources of revenue and budgets. Responsibilities and functions might include:

- 1. Coordinating and facilitating cooperative organizing efforts (including research, strategic planning, cooperative targeting and a pared-down adjudicatory bureaucracy) among participating unions;**
- 2. Establishing organizer recruitment and training programs in conjunction with participating unions;**
- 3. Developing occupational, industry, and employment policies and collective bargaining standards, including professional development or apprenticeship programs;**
- 4. Identifying and supporting legislative priorities;**
- 5. Coordinating with the AFL-CIO leadership and sister labor centers on specific issues, programs or projects as appropriate and necessary; and,**
- 6. Coordinating multiunion collective bargaining campaign strategies, including the development of portable benefit programs where useful and necessary.**

The strategic objective of such a structure is to increase unionization more rapidly within a particular occupation, industry, employer or region rather than to grow any single union. This approach relies on voluntarism and inclusion rather than exclusivity, and is premised on the assumption that more than enough organizing opportunities exist to fill the plate of every willing union in the federation.

Further, partnerships established through participation in Industry/Occupation Labor Centers and cooperative organizing efforts—when combined with various financial or other programmatic incentives made available through the AFL-CIO—could provide a smoother, more democratic and effective route to strategic union mergers and consolidations than top-down coercion.

Operational incentives could include tying AFL-CIO programmatic assistance and Article XX or XXI protections for new organizing in certain industries or occupations to participation in, and adherence to the standards of, applicable Industry/Occupation Labor Centers. In order to promote strategic union mergers resulting from partnerships forged through participation in Industry/Occupation Labor Centers, AFL-CIO per capita for the smaller of the merging unions might be waived for a period of time to offset the transitional costs of accomplishing the merger.

Establishing a venue for cooperation and providing incentives for union mergers that grow from such efforts is more likely to succeed than mergers that are forced or otherwise dictated from the outside. The AFT's experience in pursuing merger with the NEA demonstrates the difficulties of moving such an agenda even with the full support of the leadership of both national organizations. Any attempt to dictate which unions must or cannot merge with one another, in a world of active involved leaders and rank and file, would from the start be doomed to fail.

Cooperative organizing, bargaining and representation will be challenging. Trust will need to be established and sustained and obstacles overcome, especially in the matter of jurisdiction. But the effectiveness and power of inclusive, democratic and voluntary solutions should not be underestimated, nor should the potentially corrosive and organizationally dysfunctional potential of coercive or exclusionary approaches be ignored.

5. Expand Initiatives for Organizing Outside Collective Bargaining

Labor should intensify and help coordinate efforts to reach out to American workers who currently may not be eligible for collective bargaining representation but still value a relationship with the labor movement. During the 2004 presidential election, the AFL-CIO signed up nearly 1 million nonrepresented workers through Working America. CWA has signed workers at GE and Microsoft in the absence of collective bargaining; several unions have organized public employee organizations, teachers and school employees in states without public employee bargaining; and the AFT has affiliated professional associations of psychologists and dental hygienists.

Outreach of this sort broadens labor's base, enables communication with individuals we otherwise would never reach, and establishes a foundation for developing new forms of collective representation as well as traditional collective bargaining relationships.

6. Solidarity Organizing—Another Organizing Approach

Unions of the CIO—individually and as a group—invested heavily in organizing work conducted by independent start-up organizing committees and emerging brother-and-sister unions in the conviction that helping other workers to organize simply was the right thing to do. In the case of steel, the UMWA and CIO supported the establishment and expansion of local Steelworker Organizing committees, which eventually became the USWA. Later, in the case of public employees and teachers, the UAW, the Industrial Union Department, the Seafarers, Steelworkers, needle trades unions and a number of large central labor councils all contributed crucial financial, logistical, staff and political support that enabled emerging unions such as AFSCME and the AFT to win collective bargaining rights and attain exponential growth. This support was provided on the basis of solidarity and the recognition that adding to the strength of the

movement as a whole was more important strategically than adding numbers to any single particular union. The AFL-CIO now could play a significant strategic and operational role in marshaling support for such efforts.

In the case of large enterprises such as Wal-Mart or Delta Airlines, for example, where the employer's wealth, breadth and presence is such that the challenge may be beyond the resources and reach of an existing union, the AFL-CIO could play a lead role in coordinating a long-term movement-wide commitment of assistance to the lead organizing union. Such assistance could include substantial long-term financial assistance, long-term loaning of staff and field offices, and other material assistance for carrying out a strategic organizing plan.

Similarly, organizing in new areas such as high tech, insurance and banking, public and private sector employers in the South and West, manufacturing transplants, etc., may require creating new unions from scratch and even adopting unconventional tactics unencumbered by the restraints of current labor law. Existing unions have much to risk and lose through the purposeful violation of Taft-Hartley (secondary boycotts and shutdowns, sit-down strikes, etc.); organizing committees of start-up unions with no accumulated treasuries or bricks and mortar might enjoy greater strategic and tactical flexibility and would have substantially less to lose through the smart and strategic use of unconventional approaches where appropriate. The AFL-CIO could explore the legal and financial avenues for building institutional firewalls for donor unions (or for the AFL-CIO as a donor organization) that would be responsible for providing money, logistical assistance, long-term loaned staff and other help without the expectation of an organizational quid pro quo. The expectation is that increasing union density in any sector, by any union—even by those that have not yet been invented—benefits all union members everywhere and the labor movement as a whole.

Summary

The labor movement needs to lead with our values. Achieving occupational, industry or sector density for the labor movement as a whole is more important than achieving density within organized labor for any individual union or group of unions. Inordinate attention to exclusionary structures, zero-sum approaches to jurisdiction, and departures from workplace activism and decision-making have the potential to hinder rather than advance progress toward our goals.

If labor is to regain the strength and influence necessary to advocate effectively for our members and advance a comprehensive agenda for all working people and their families, we need to move from an organizing culture of internal competition to one of unprecedented cooperation. This means clearly defining the values, role and purpose of the AFL-CIO, streamlining its governance and operations, unifying and strengthening the structure and reach of subordinate bodies, and experimenting with flexible new mechanisms for bringing unions together to organize effectively to scale and effectively advance the interests of working people in every relevant venue.

Submitted to the AFL-CIO, December 2004